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“Sundered” is part of the “House of Mirrored Faces” collection, and spans the period covered by the latter part of *Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan* and the events in *Star Trek: The Search for Spock*

SUNDERED

by Lynda Carraher©

Lara Merritt was in her office on Hadrian when the bottom fell out of her world. She had just reached for a box of data chips from the shelf, looking over her shoulder at the packing boxes and wondering how she was ever going to get her belongings sorted in time for her scheduled departure.

Then something hit her in the chest and she went down, thinking, *My God, I'm having a heart attack*. But as she hit the floor, she felt the terrible wrenching in her skull, in her chest, in her groin, as if some giant hand had split the skin

and was ripping out living organs; as her vision went black, she realized it wasn't a heart attack at all.

* * *

By the time the official notification finally caught up with her, she was only hours away from planetfall on Vulcan.

...regret to inform you ... line of duty ... gave his life ... extreme gallantry...

She hoped Sarek and Amanda had already received their formal condolences from Starfleet. She didn't want to have to tell them . . . didn't think she *could* tell them . . . that their only child was dead.

They were waiting at the arrivals lounge, Sarek as gravely distant as ever, and Amanda only a pale ghost at his side. There was no mistaking that look; she saw it herself now every time she looked in a mirror. She approached them formally, the Sundered daughter, pressed her fingertips together and bowed her head. "I grieve with thee," she said, and there was no tremor in her voice.

She was proud of that – no one here needed to know that when she had struggled back to consciousness there in her office, alone – really alone this time – she had wept and

raged and thrown things and shrieked her fury at the uncaring fates.

“And I with thee,” Sarek replied with an equally formal bow. Amanda said nothing, in clear violation of the custom, and Lara wondered if anyone had given her permission to weep and rage and throw things, or if she was trying to keep it all bottled up inside as a proper Vulcan mother should.

Sarek shook off the formal stance and reached for her single bag. “I shall arrange for your other luggage to be sent to the house.”

“There isn’t any. Everything else I own is somewhere between Hadrian and Earth – unless it’s been diverted to Vulcan.” At his unspoken question, she explained “I was getting ready to leave for my new posting. To join Spock in San Francisco.”

* * *

There was no getting around it. They went back to the family compound, sat talking far into the night trying to make sense of the incomprehensible. It was supposed to be a cadet training cruise. Just that. Fourteen days, a couple of planetfalls, some mapping exercises. How could he die?

With “extreme gallantry”? And did that make any difference? Extreme gallantry didn’t heal the wounds in her mind, the wounds in her heart. Their hearts.

Forget the notion that Vulcans didn’t have emotions. She had known that for a decade and more. At the moment, they were parents whose only child was gone. And she was that useless appendage in the clan: a Sundered bondmate. No children. No clan. No family of her own, with her father dead almost a year now.

What she did have, as it turned out, was a substantial inheritance. She had known his family was prominent, had known Spock held properties and incomes in his own name. They had been managed and invested for him against the day when he would leave Starfleet. And now they were hers. Except that she didn’t want them. Didn’t want anything to tie her now to this planet.

“I can’t accept this, Sarek. I don’t need them. I don’t want them. And it would be wrong to let them pass out of clan ownership after hundreds of years.”

“We had hoped ... for the sake of the clan...” Sarek was ashen. “The line is ending,” he said, and Lara remembered something Spock had told her – *‘Vulcan culture has long been obsessed with the continuation of genetic lines and*

with the survival of the clans. Many forms of conception and parturition are acceptable.’ There were cultures, she knew, even contemporary cultures, in which a childless widow was expected to marry back within her husband’s family, to bear children with one of his brothers. Except that Spock had no brothers. There was only one way for his line to continue.

She looked at Amanda, who had been silent through most of the evening. Who was silent now, but with tears tracking her cheeks – a violation of custom so shocking that Lara felt a cold chill climbing her spine. She knew what Sarek was going to say; didn’t want to hear it. Oh, it would all be quite sterile and arm’s-length and decorously done in a laboratory, but the very thought nauseated her. She jumped into the pause in the conversation.

“Sarek, there are medical issues you’re not aware of. It was never likely that Spock and I would have children together. And I’m thirty-nine years old – that’s late for a Human woman to begin considering a first pregnancy.” Never mind that was precisely what she and Spock had been planning.

She recognized the expression that flickered oh-so-faintly across his face. Had seen it on Spock’s face often when his

own estimation of the logic of a situation crashed head-on into Human inconsistency.

“Lara ... Daughter... Forgive me, but ... you do not wish to claim your position as Spock’s heir. And you are unable to carry his line forward. Why, then, did you come to Vulcan?”

She opened her mouth to snap out an answer and realized something quite suddenly. “I... it was ... *I don’t know.*” The oddity of it, the unquestioning movement toward a planet that held nothing for her any longer, stopped her throat for a moment. “It was just something I was compelled to do, from the moment I realized what had happened. I never considered any other action. I suppose I wanted to be here when they brought his— When they brought him home.”

Amanda gasped softly, bowed her head, reached out and touched her husband’s thigh. The only thing Lara found more shocking than that action was that Sarek – *Sarek!* – covered the hand with his own. She was as embarrassed as if she had walked in on them making love.

“My son’s body was committed to space. Did you not receive notification?”

“Just the formal one.” If it had carried any details, she didn’t remember them. “What happened, Sarek? Who made that decision? And why?”

“I have made inquiries. Starfleet was not particularly forthcoming with the details, so I availed myself of ... other sources.” Lara had grown up an embassy brat; she knew precisely what kinds of strings a prominent diplomat like Sarek could pull. “I know only that Admiral Kirk was with him. There was an attack on the *Enterprise* and Spock died as a result of it.”

Jim. Of course. There was a symmetry to it – almost an inevitability. She had been jealous of him at first because he had a closeness to Spock she could never share. Then, when Spock seemed determined to shut them both out of his life, they had turned to one another for comfort, only to turn away again when they realized there was nothing that way but harm for everyone. And finally the two men had joined forces to find her when she was lost within the Romulan Empire. So that it had been Jim and not she who was there when Spock died put the final symmetry to their lives.

She spoke a single word, so softly she had not thought it would be heard. But Sarek heard it, understood it –

possibly better and more completely than she had the first time she had heard it.

“*T’hy’la*,” she said again, in response to his querying expression. “I was his wife. His bondmate. But Jim was his *t’hy’la*. Always. And if I couldn’t be there...”

Sarek sat back. “Yes,” he said, almost to himself. And if Lara couldn’t see the exact thoughts chasing through Sarek’s mind, she knew some idea was birthing there. “Perhaps everything is not lost.” And then, as if remembering he was not alone in the room: “I must go to Earth. To see Admiral Kirk. To retrieve what he holds for us.”

“I don’t understand ... but I can be ready to go whenever you are.”

Sarek stood, exchanged a long look – and undoubtedly a mental touch – with Amanda, then spoke to Lara.

“My wife ... is not well. She cannot possibly travel at this time.”

Lara looked at the older woman and realized it was not all grief that had made her an almost ghostly replica of herself.

Berated herself for not having seen it earlier. Cardiac insufficiency? Pulmonary fibrosis?

“In my absence ... I would ask that you remain here, with her. It would ... allow me to concentrate on the task at hand.”

Lara knew that was as close as Sarek could come to asking her for a personal favor. The only way he could say her presence would relieve a worry he could not admit to having. And there was, therefore, only one answer she could give.

She stood, gave him the formal bow of daughter to father. “I am honored to serve.”

* * *

Honor. Service. Loss. Recovery. It meant everything. It meant nothing. Because word came – incredibly – that Spock ... or some form of Spock ... was indeed living. Regenerated in the energy field of the Genesis Planet, and coming home to Vulcan. Spock, but not Spock. Living, but not alive. No memory, no intellect, no ... soul, if you will. That was all being carried by Leonard McCoy, unwitting if not necessarily unwilling keeper of the *Katra*. McCoy – not Kirk – who had been there when Spock made the

voluntary transition from life to death, and gave that final demonstration of meeting the needs of the many.

Lara waited, torn between anticipation and dread, for the arrival of the ship. Sarek had attempted to explain the *fal'tor pann*; she had researched the minuscule amount of information available and learned mostly that it was not always successful. In fact, the success rate was low.

And if it failed this time? What of the empty hulk that would remain? Should she witness? Did she want to? Was it required of her?

She really didn't know what her decision might have been. It was taken out of her hands, in any case, by the worsening of Amanda's condition. The older woman's lungs were failing, after decades of attempting to extract adequate oxygen from Vulcan's atmosphere. Regeneration was planned, but she had become so ill so quickly – her condition exacerbated by the report of Spock's death – that she was no longer strong enough to withstand the treatment. The Healers were attempting to build up her strength, but it would have been fatal to ask her to spend the night of the ceremony in witness. And Lara chose to stay with her at the family compound. Told herself it was her duty, part of her obligation to Sarek. Refused to

consider the possibility that she could not bear watching their last hope flicker into oblivion.

She waited in the courtyard, trying to still the shaking of her knees, as the embassy aircar bearing Sarek and Spock stopped at the gate. He alighted uncertainly, still wrapped in the white robe the acolytes had dressed him in, moving slowly behind Sarek. Her breath caught in her throat. He looked ... worn. Older. Unsteady. Uncertain.

Sarek gave her an almost imperceptible head-shake, and it stopped her nascent movement. They walked past her, and Spock's gaze flicked over her. Without acknowledgement. Without recognition.

She managed to stay upright until they had passed into the house. Then she fell to her knees, buried her face in her hands, and let the tears come.

* * *

Just an hour, Kirk thought. One stolen hour to think about nothing, to search for serenity in scent and sound and luminous shapes. One brief period of solitude before the dawn, before he and his crew again tackled the repair of that creaking monstrosity of a ship which would eventually

take them back to face whatever censure and punishment was awaiting on Earth.

When he heard the subtle shift of sand in the pathway, he thought perhaps it was Amanda; for some reason the step sounded feminine to him. But he was totally unprepared for the slim, dark-haired form that stepped out of the darkness.

“Lara?” He stepped back, stunned. The edge of a bench hit him behind the knees, and he sat rather more heavily than he had intended. A lot of things had sneaked up from behind lately, it seemed, and knocked the pins out from under him.

“Bad penny,” she said, and sat down next to him as if she had been invited.

“No, it’s not that. I’m just – have you been here all along?”

“I could ask you to define ‘all along’, but I’ll just say I’ve been here longer than you have, this time. With Sarek and Amanda, at first, and recently at the Earth embassy. Trying to keep this from getting any more complicated than it already is.”

“I don’t understand.”

She rocked a little on the hard bench, rubbing the heels of her hands over her eyes. “No, I guess you don’t.” She reached for his hand and pulled him to his feet. “How long has it been since you had a cup of real coffee? I happen to know Amanda has a stash of Jamaican Blue in the kitchen.”

He followed her in and watched her work, still trying to grasp a single thought from the school that swarmed in his brain, but they kept slipping through his mental grasp like minnows through a salmon net.

She kept her back to him – purposely, he thought – and said, “Uhura told me about your son. I’m so sorry, Jim.”

Kirk felt he had fallen into a play where everyone knew their lines but him. “Uhura told you that? How did – when did you see her?”

“Don’t ask. Just be aware if that woman ever tells everything she knows, the trouble you’re in now will look like a Sunday School picnic.”

Kirk figured there was more truth than fiction to that, and chose not to comment. By the time she set the aromatic

brew in front of him, he had settled on the one question he knew he had to ask.

“Have you seen him?”

“Yes.”

That wasn't what he wanted to know, and she knew it. But apparently she wasn't going to make it easy.

“And?” he prompted.

She smoothed the place mat; placed the coffee mug precisely in the center. “And apparently there were a few things that didn't quite make the transfer. Like the fact that he had a wife.”

“Has.”

“No, Jim. *Had*. There's nothing there. No recognition, no memory, no bond. Gone.”

“Legally—“

“*Legally*? You want to open *that* can of worms? Spock was dead, Jim. He died. I felt it.”

“And I saw it.” Would quite probably continue to see it in nightmare for the rest of his life.

“So who is the person that came out of the temple last week? What is he? And what am I? Am I a widow? Am I a wife? I’m certainly not a bondmate anymore.”

“Spock loves you, Lara. He may not be able to express it ___”

“Oh, that’s the irony of all this. He’d finally – *finally* – grown into himself. He was a man complete after the V’Ger meld. Satisfied with who he was, functioning in a job he loved, finally able to balance both halves of himself. To commit himself emotionally to a relationship. Why do you think he went to Hadrian twice in the last two years? Why do you think I came to Earth three times in that same period? We were even talking about children. Did you know that?”

“No.” He studied the coffee in the cup. “He shared a lot with me, but ... no. Not that.” He turned the cup around to see if it would change the view. It didn’t. “Look,” he offered, “he’s not really himself yet. It’s going to take a while. And when he gets himself together, you two can re-bond—”

“I don’t know if he’ll want that. Hell, I don’t know if *I* want it. I don’t know if I have the energy to put things back together. I know I can’t face being hurt like that again. The Sundering was ... it was as bad as . . . anything that happened to me during the war.” It was her turn to look into the depths of the coffee. “And there’s a slight complication. Saavik is pregnant. She told Amanda this morning.”

He was glad to be sitting down. “—David?—” he blurted.

She dragged her hands through her hair in a clear gesture of exasperation. “My God, Jim, not David. Though from what I hear, he would have liked that. She wasn’t interested.”

“Those Klingon bastards—” He half rose out of his chair.

“Jesus, how can you be so dense? It’s Spock’s child.”

“No.” He shook his head. “Can’t be.”

“Think about it. Saavik’s report says he appeared to be about seven years old when they found him. When you got him off the planet, he had aged, what—? Forty, fifty years beyond that? Sometime in that interval, he reached sexual maturity and went through a *pon farr* cycle. There was no

other woman on the planet. She says it's Spock's child, and I believe her."

He sat for a moment, trying to process it all. Thought of his own past, with Carol. What she'd said about her pregnancy, when she'd said it. And theirs had been a love affair, not just an instinct-driven mating.

"Does he know? Has she told him?"

"I have no idea. And it really doesn't matter. Whether they bond, whether they marry – that child is of the clan. There's no such thing as illegitimacy under Vulcan law."

"What are you going to do?"

She shrugged. "Good question. Go back to Hadrian, if I can finagle it. If not, report to the Presidio in two weeks and take that posting. Awkward, if Spock recovers enough to go back to his teaching position. But there are certainly other ex-lovers wandering around San Francisco who manage to avoid each other." She took a sip of the coffee. "And you, my dear Admiral? What are you going to do?"

"Go back to Earth. Take my lumps. Try to keep them from hanging my crew along with me."

“No more rabbits in the hat?”

“Lady, I don’t even have a hat this time.”

She smiled at that, a sweet, sad smile that he remembered from a million years and a billion miles ago, pushed away from the table, and crossed to where he sat.

“You’ll think of something,” she said, and dropped a chaste kiss at the corner of his mouth, then moved away as he reached for her hand, her fingers trailing through his. “Godspeed, Jim,” she said, and left.

* * *

Lara told herself she should go, now. Go back to her room at the embassy. She had charted Amanda’s progress and sent a message to Sarek, once again on Earth as the legal wrangles over the Genesis planet played out, assuring him that the procedure had been successful. Amanda was healing; her promise to them both was fulfilled. There was nothing holding her in this place, on this planet.

But no, she had to go for a stroll in the night garden. Had found Jim there, seeking the serenity that eluded them both. After carefully avoiding him ever since they brought

Spock home, had tonight allowed herself to voice her doubts, her anger, her sadness.

Whoever said confession was good for the soul? They were wrong, she thought, gathering up her medikit. What was good for the soul was ... starlight. And the scent of white flowers, the splash of a fountain, the sound of the nightbirds.

Almost against her own will, she was drawn again to the sanded paths and the cooling air. Wandered, breathing deeply, until she felt some measure of calm returning, and sat – for just a moment, she told herself – at the bench near the luminescent jala vine. She closed her eyes and rolled some of the tension out of her neck muscles.

“Do I know you?”

The sound of the familiar voice sent a jolt of electricity through her and she scrambled to her feet, her medikit tumbling off her lap. “I’m ... I’m Dr. Merritt,” she said, willing her voice not to tremble. “I’m assisting the Healers in treating your mother.” Not a lie. She wouldn’t confuse him with lies. Nor would she give what she wasn’t sure she wanted him to have.

He stood, hands clasped behind his back, in the white acolyte's robe, and tilted his head slightly, as if listening for something just on the edge of audibility.

“No,” he said. “From . . . before.”

She could feel his gaze on her, could see the craggy outlines of that loved face, more relaxed and stronger than when she first saw him after the re-fusion. She could feel the tingling of her skin, the warming that started deep in her belly, and told herself sternly – *no. Not again.*

He was looking down, she realized. At her feet.

“You had no shoes.”

“It would be very rude to appear at your home improperly dressed.”

He went on as if he had not heard her. “And there was music. I remember music.” That last spoken with pride, like a child proclaiming facility at some adult skill.

Go, she told herself. Go now. Don't try to make conversation, don't try to be polite. Just get the hell out. Now. While you still can. And found herself unable to move, almost unable to breathe.

“You asked me something,” he said, moving toward her. Cocked his head again to hear that unheard voice, nodded to himself, made a half-bow, and extended his hand to her.

“Dr. Merritt,” he said formally, “would you care to dance?”

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